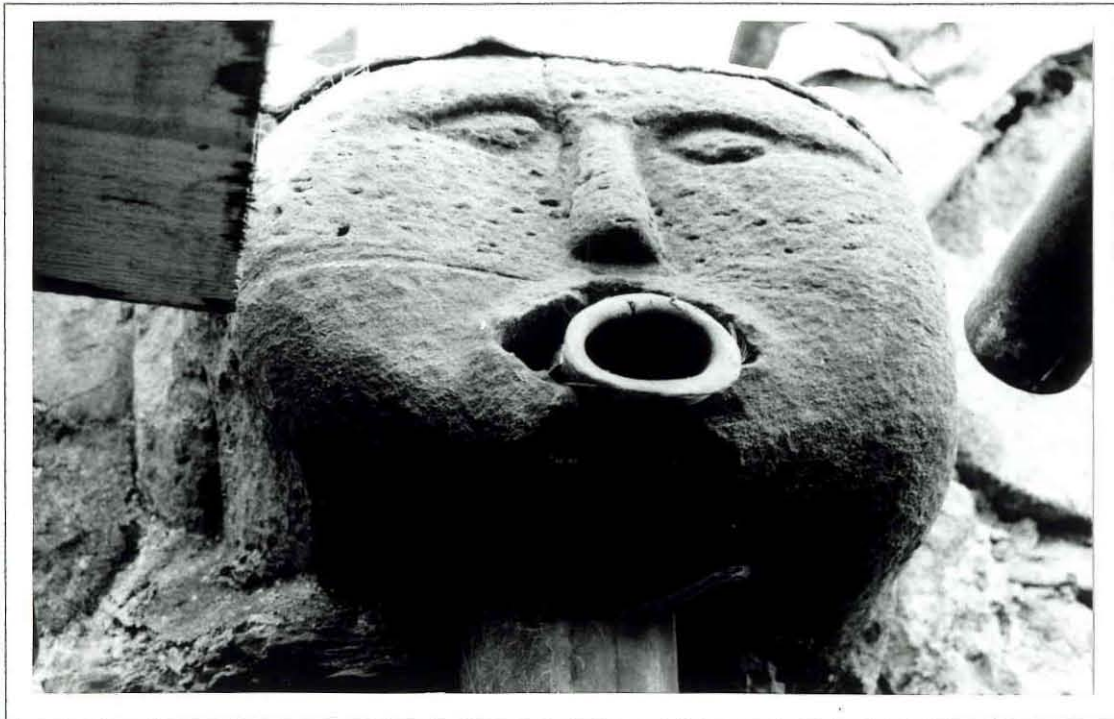


THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

St Trillo's Church, Llandrillo-yn-Rhos,  
Conwy  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORDING



CPAT Report No 403

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**St Trillo's Church, Llandrillo-yn-Rhos,  
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ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORDING**

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November 2000

Report for Robin Wolley, Esq

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## CPAT Report Record

### Report and status

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## CONTENTS

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Background history
- 3 The church and the work programme
- 4 The east end
- 5 The north wall
- 6 The west wall
- 7 The south wall
- 8 The porch
- 9 The tower
- 10 The building sequence
- 10 Bibliography

## ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig.1: Llandrillo-yn-Rhos church: possible sequence of development based on Radford 1939 and taken from the church guide

- Plate 1: butt joint between north and south naves in east wall
- Plate 2: medieval head stop to east window of south nave
- Plate 3: primitive head functioning as a water spout on east wall
- Plate 4: blocked arcade arch in north wall of north nave
- Plate 5: blocked arcade arch in north wall - detail of surviving medieval plaster
- Plate 6: blocked arcade in north wall - details of pier
- Plate 7: blocked window in north wall of north nave
- Plate 8: masonry infill on top of west wall of south nave
- Plate 9: putlog hole in west wall of south nave
- Plate 10: east wall of porch after render removal
- Plate 11: reused decorated stonework in south wall of church
- Plate 12: reused sandstone in south wall of church
- Plate 13: west window in south wall with decorated fragments above and to one side
- Plate 14: blocked priest's doorway in south wall



## **1 Introduction**

1.1 A watching brief and associated recording was undertaken by the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust at St Trillo's Church, Llandrillo-yn-Rhos in the summer of 2000, as a result of a decision to renovate the exterior of the building. The exterior had been variably rendered in the past and the quinquennial review had highlighted problems of damp that needed to be rectified. St Trillo's is a grade II\* listed building with a long history, having started as a mother church in the early medieval era. Its appearance, even before the removal of the render coats, indicated a complex history and two carved stone fragments were visible high up on the south wall. Architecturally it is without doubt one of the most significant sites in the Archdeaconry of St Asaph.

## **2 Background history**

2.1 An outline history of the church is given in the church guide by the late Norman Tucker (1965). A more analytical assessment appears in unpublished notes by the late C A Raleigh Radford housed in the National Monuments Record (Aberystwyth). On the basis of his records and other documented statements, a summary of the architectural history of Llandrillo church is as follows (and see Fig 1.)

i) nothing of the early medieval church remains; this was presumably of timber and the only traces would come from controlled excavation within the interior.

ii) a small church of the 12th century comprising a nave and narrower chancel; walling of the former survives on north side of present church.

iii) aisles were added, that to the south was completed, that to north started with the insertion of two bays of an arcade, but this aisle was subsequently abandoned and the bays blocked off. The evidence for a south aisle was provided by the abrupt termination of the chamfered plinth on the west side of south nave, suggesting a pre-existing wall. This phase was attributed to the prior to the Edwardian conquest of the late 13th century.

iv) the tower was added with an entrance from the nave, possibly in the 15th century.

v) the south nave was added in the 15th century.

vi) on the basis of the architectural style, the present arcade dated to c.1520 was inserted, and the east and south windows introduced.

vii) porch of c.1540 added.

## **3 The church and the work programme**

3.1 St Trillo's comprises a north nave and chancel, a south nave of similar proportions and length, a west tower attached to the west end of the north nave, a south porch, and on the north side a choir vestry and an organ chamber. Patchy render covered the north and south walls, though some of that on the former was considered to be of a sufficiently satisfactory quality to obviate the need for further work. The west and east ends were covered with sub-standard render and this was stripped away. The tower had been cleaned and renovated several years previously.

3.2 The watching brief involved the examination of the fabric as each face of the building had its render coatings removed. Photographs were taken of the stonework before the new render



was added. This work was conducted on the following days: 10 July, 8 August, 4 September, 18 September with a final visit on 12 October 2000, after restoration work on the church had been completed.

## **4 The east wall**

### **4.1 The north nave**

4.1.1 The earliest stonework revealed by the removal of the render is at the north-east corner of the north nave (the chancel). Large, shaped blocks of limestone have been used for quoins and the lower foundation courses (fabric A), but these break off abruptly at a height of 2.5m above ground level. Similarly there is a vertical 'break' in this fabric at 2.3m north of the angle, and though this is directly below the Victorian Gothic window, the change from one fabric to another is certainly of much older date. It was not possible to trace the continuation of this earlier build around to the north side of the chancel because the render is relatively sound on this side and effectively disguises the subtleties in the fabric. However, it is noticeable that there is more red sandstone in the fabric at higher levels and this may well indicate a continuation of the pattern seen at the north-east corner.

4.1.2 Above and beyond (to the north of) the fabric A build, the stonework changes character, appearing as a random mixture of limestone (which still predominated), pink sandstone, water-worn pebbles, 'plates of darker laminated rock (perhaps a shale or mudstone) and some infilling with small stone, again mainly limestone (= fabric B). There is very little evidence of any coursing in this stonework. Towards the apex of the gable most of the stone is limestone of small size.

4.1.3 The east window as noted above is a Victorian insertion from 1857 (Tucker 1965, 7), and on a smaller scale than its medieval five-light predecessor. Several courses of freestone slabs have been introduced into the wall beneath it to provide a firm base. Packing stones are clearly evident around the window dressings, some in olive-buff freestone.

4.1.4 A distinctive butt joint is visible at the juncture of the north and south nave walls (Plate 1). The quoins at the south-east angle of the north nave are predominantly of pink sandstone and though a few have been removed during earlier construction work, most are still in situ. As was only to be expected these are not directly below the valley between the two naves but slightly to the north, confirming beyond any doubt that the north nave is earlier than its southern counterpart. Just below the valley the rotting timberwork of the external truss of the north nave gable is just visible. Likewise at the north-east angle of the north nave the quoins associated with this fabric area are predominately of pink sandstone in contrast to the limestone below.

4.1.5 At the valley opening is a 'grotesque' head, worn and pitted, in pink sandstone (Plate 3). The hole in its base to take a downpipe is probably relatively recent and the mouth may have been enlarged to take a lead pipe but the head as a whole appears to be of considerable age. Its dimensions are 0.22m high, 0.33m across and in depth it is greater than 0.32m. Dr N Edwards of the University of Wales, Bangor has suggested to the writer that it is broadly similar to some of (?)13th-century date in Gwynedd, but it remains a puzzle as to why no mention of this head appears in earlier reports on the church.

### **4.2 The south nave**

4.2.1 The south nave has a projecting foundation course, and above this a basal plinth with coping stones, all in limestone. Large limestone blocks form the plinth and also the lower



courses of the wall below the window (fabric A variant). Above these the south nave stonework is also a random mix with limestone blocks, some sandstone and rather more black 'shale plates' than in the north nave wall face, some of much larger size and again probably a shale or mudstone (fabric C). Two dressed sandstone blocks, north of the window, must be re-used. The presence of the shale/mudstone plates provides a more coursed appearance to the stonework than in the north nave. Little infilling around the window implies that its dressings are largely original. The quoins are almost entirely of worked limestone.

4.2.2 At the gable the fabric is in places almost entirely of water-worn pebbles (fabric D); this suggests that the builders were running out of readily available material rather than offering evidence for a rebuild.

4.2.3 The window is considered to be largely original though the dressings are not much worn. The hoodmould has worn head stops (Plate 2), of slightly different design and size (one 140 x 110mm, the other 135 x 80mm), but the level of wear on the hoodmould stone of which they are an integral part is comparable with that on the other hoodmould stones above the arch.

## **5 The north wall**

5.1 The north face of the church is interrupted by an organ chamber with an attached annex that was formerly a store towards the east end of the building and a vestry towards the west end. The vestry was converted from a hearse house of unknown date, while the organ chamber has been attributed to the restoration of c.1875. Their insertion has effectively broken the visible stonework of the north wall into three sections.

5.2 The eastern end of the wall exhibits coarse, spread pointing which disguises much of the masonry. The relatively good condition of this pointing has obviated the need for any new work on this portion of the wall, so little new information has been made available. What can be discerned is fabric A at the north-east angle where it reaches a height of more than 2.3m above the current ground level, but then appears to drop relatively quickly so that at about 2m from the corner it is down to c.1.4m in height, indicating that much of this wall face has been rebuilt, probably in fabric B.

5.3 The central part of the north wall (between the vestry and the organ chamber) has long been a feature of the church because of the blocked arcade immured in the wall. One complete bay of the arcade is visible with part of a second though rather more of it must have been visible (Plate 4) before the choir vestry and its predecessor, the hearse house, was added, and this can be adduced from the interior where two complete arches remain in situ. The complete bay is 3.9m high from ground level to the soffit, and 3.07m wide between the inner faces of the piers. The pier on the east, though partially hidden by the annex to the organ chamber, is almost certainly a respond for there is no evidence of a further arcade arch to the east of it. The chamfered jamb of pink sandstone is complete and there is an indication of an abacus at the top of the pier; between the blocks small plates of shale have been regularly inserted with the mortar. The pier supporting both arches is square or rectangular with chamfered angles, and a complete abacus remains (Plate 6). Parts of the eastern face of the pier have been removed, though the reason for this is unclear. However, this dressed stone may have been re-used in the blocking (see below). The arch consists of voussoirs of both laminated shale (or slate) and pink sandstone, up to 0.6m long; the springers and the arch stones immediately above them are of cruder design than the voussoirs higher up; the original plaster on the soffit of the arch remains (Plate 5). The second (incomplete) arch is of much the same design and appearance as the complete one. The arcade has been blocked up with rubble masonry, well-constructed and intermittently coursed. This is mainly of limestone blocks, occasional blocks of shale with quartz banding, some of which may have been derived from pebbles, and smaller laminating slabs of grey shale used for filling the interstices.



5.4 To the east of the arcade and showing above the annex is a blocked window (Plate 7). Its complete outline is visible, although its base may originally have dropped below the level of the annex roof and thus be disguised. As it now appears, it is 1.75m high and 0.96m wide and its apex is about 0.4m below the roof ledge. Although some of the stones that form the outline of the window are almost good enough to be classed as jamb stones for the frame of the window it is likely that all the window dressings have been removed, not least because of the asymmetrical appearance that the aperture now presents. The blocking of the window is in different masonry (= fabric G) to that of the arcade, being more of a mix of limestone, sandstone and pebbles with small limestone fragments in the interstices. East of the window the masonry is fabric A, but it is impossible to ascertain whether this was an original window or was inserted into a pre-existing wall. Above the window and indeed above and around the arcade arches is a mixed masonry, probably but not certainly B.

5.5 At the west end of the north wall, only a small portion of the face is visible. For a little over 1m the quoins are of limestone and the masonry appears to be fabric A. However above 1.07m the quoins are mixed blocks of limestone and sandstone and generally smaller, and a jagged edge suggests rebuilding. That this occurred when the tower was built is suggested by the fact that the change in quoin appearance coincides with the top of the battered plinth of the tower.

## **6 The west wall**

6.1 The west wall like the other sides of the south nave has a basal plinth capped with sloping coping stones, but this only extends from the south-west corner for only 3.60m, stopping abruptly, and the remaining 3.34m to the edge of the tower is plinth-less. Prior to the commencement of the renovation work, this wall face was covered by a coat of heavy pebble-dashed render broken only by the large Victorian Gothic three-light window, an insertion of 1857 replacing a square-headed window seen by Glynne in 1850. At the base is almost certainly a modern drain, cement-capped with a surface which is 0.2-0.3m below the adjacent ground level in the churchyard. The height of the gable to its coping stones is a little under 9.1m.

6.2 Removal of the render revealed at least three different fabrics in the wall, ambivalent traces of a west door, and considerable rebuilding.

6.3 There can be no doubt that the plinth is an original feature; the quoins and coping stones are of limestone, and most of the masonry is limestone too, though there are also occasional slabs of a grey stone which is perhaps not limestone (fabric A variant). Above this the masonry comprises mainly medium large blocks of limestone, exceptionally up to 0.95m long and some fashioned to shape, a certain amount of dark tabular shale-like material and in the interstices smaller stone of similar material (fabric C). At higher levels there is occasional re-used sandstone, one particular block being dressed and having chamfered edges, and a truly square face. This material rises high up the wall as far as the base of the gable, it shows some coursing, and is no more than a variant form of the masonry in the east wall of the south nave.

6.4 This fabric is interrupted by the window insertion and underneath the window where the plinth comes to an end. The vertical edge of the plinth is a little ragged as though the northern part of it were deliberately removed at a later date, yet the incorporation of at least one possible block of sandstone at this end could conceivably suggest that the termination might be part of the original design. This alternative is strengthened by the possibility of the survival of the southern jamb of a west door. Extending to a height of 1.26m above the ground level are a series of stone blocks forming an edge which though not vertical is certainly indicative of some sort of feature. These blocks include two in pink sandstone, one of which may be slightly



chamfered, and a medium sized limestone pebble. If they do reveal a west door its architectural detail was not of high quality, though it is also possible that these stones butted against a series of dressed jamb stones, all of which were removed.

6.5 The masonry to the north of this edge of stones, is different from that to the south; it is a random mixture of lumps of often irregular limestone, rounded pebbles, some of which are split to reveal flattish faces, occasional lumps of pink and purple sandstone, very occasional tabular stone, and occasional lumps of red and yellow brick, all rather randomly constructed without any evidence of coursing (fabric E). Though showing some variation in its consistency, with more pebbles at higher levels, this material constitutes the masonry as high as the apex of the gable. It is thus quite evident that there was a major rebuilding of the west wall, almost certainly in the post-medieval era, and that this masonry butts up against the stonework of the tower. The window is set into this very mixed fabric yet it is not certain that its insertion dates the rebuilding. Two metres or so to either side of the window there is a jagged disconformity in the fabric and at least on the north side some of the stonework immediately around the window is depressed slightly in comparison with the masonry further from the window. It is thus quite possible that the new Victorian window was inserted into a wall previously rebuilt.

6.6 Putlog holes in this wall face have been filled with brick fragments (Plate 9). A minimum of five can be identified, both to the north and the south of the window, the lowest at 2.44m above ground level. These probably relate to the rebuilding programme.

6.7 At the apex, the gable slope has been filled in so that the top edge of the nave runs horizontally to meet the tower wall (Plate 8). This can be clearly seen from the change in masonry to roughly coursed blocks of limestone (fabric F). The original roofline can still be determined though where it meets the tower there may have been some rebuilding. A leaded outlet for the drainage of the valley between the two naves is still in place. No date can be placed on this work but it is likely to be from the last century or so. (Unlike many churches in the diocese, the later 19th-century faculty petitions for Llandrillo church do not appear to have been preserved, so it is not possible to tie any of the structural changes in the building to specified programmes of work in the Victorian era).

## **7 The south wall**

7.1 Removal of all of the old render coating on this wall revealed that the masonry was entirely of fabric C, not homogeneous in appearance but certainly of one build and with no indication that the roof and side walls has ever been raised, as is the case with some other churches in the region. East of the porch there are two three-light windows with a priest's door between them.

7.2 The plinth with its large coping stones, almost entirely of limestone, is continuous on this side, interrupted only where a coping stone has been removed to allow the east wall of the porch to be butted on to the nave wall, and also by the priest's doorway. The gradual slope of the ground from west to east is revealed by the visible height of the plinth. At the west end of the south wall it is 0.61m in height compared with 0.95m on the east wall of the south nave.

7.3 Above the plinth the lower courses of the wall depends heavily on large blocks of limestone up to 1.0m in length (fabric A variant), though these are interspersed with large tabular slabs of shale-like stone, and these create a degree of coursing in the stonework. By the more easterly window there are a few dressed slabs of limestone, re-used in the masonry but probably originally quoinstones, and also occasional slabs of dressed red or pink sandstone. At higher levels in the wall - in line with the springers and hoodmould stops of the more easterly window, but lower further west - the fabric is more heterogeneous containing smaller lumps of limestone, pink sandstone, cleaved slabs of shale or mudstone and



waterworn pebbles (fabric C), and coursed stonework is almost non-existent. Single putlog holes, now blocked, can be detected just to the west of both windows

7.4 It is impossible to be absolutely certain how much of the stonework of the two windows have been replaced. In both windows most of the arrises on the dressings are sharp and largely unweathered. The hoodmoulds and their stops are more weathered, and it is thus possible that only the mullions and tracery have been renewed. Possibly relevant here is that the mortar of the stonework above the western side of the more westerly window appears looser and might indicate some rebuilding, in conjunction with the reconstruction of the window (Plate 13); a similar situation occurs close to the easterly window.

7.5 With the priest's door, the blocking is clearly of recent date (though how recent is uncertain), but again the dressings of the doorway do have sharp arrises and the pyramidal stops to the chamfer are unweathered. Yet while some of the dressed stonework has probably been renewed, the jambstones closer to the base could be original (Plate 14).

7.6 High up in the wall (about 4.9m above ground level) to the west of the more westerly window are two fragments of decorated stone (Plate 11), in pink sandstone that has weathered to grey. The outer edges have a curve, and assuming that they fit together as seems likely the length of the curve would be approximately 0.45m. Specialist knowledge will be required to determine what sort of church fitting these have been derived from. A little further west and almost directly above the east wall of the porch, but about 1m lower than the previously mentioned fragments are several blocks of pink sandstone, one with a groove across its width (Plate 12). It is not clear whether this is a further architectural fragment. Unlike the two decorated fragments this has not been left exposed but has been plastered over.

## **8 The porch**

8.1 The porch, with a south door but no windows, is constructed of random masonry for its east and west walls, much of it of limestone with occasional blocks that hint at re-use, but also some lumps of sandstone, occasional waterworn pebbles and slabs of shale. The southern angles have good limestone quoins displaying some attempt at long and short work. The east wall has a projecting foundation course, giving a rustic appearance (Plate 10); there should be an equivalent foundation on the west side but this is buried. The walls of the porch have been underpinned, perhaps in 1959.

There is nothing diagnostic in the build of the porch to provide a guide to its date but it has been attributed to after 1540, the date at which Hugh Conway left money in his will for its construction (Tucker 1965, 7). The reasoning behind the date of c.1677 is unclear.

## **9 The Tower**

9.1 The tower attributed to the earlier 16th century or as late as 1552 (Tucker 1965, 8-9) did not form part of the current renovation scheme.

## **10 The building sequence**

10.1 As a result of the recording work, a sequence can be suggested which shows some revisions and simplifications to that proposed by Radford which was used, perhaps rather uncritically, in the preparation of the church plan (Fig. 1). Certainly Radford's views on the 15th-century origin of the tower and south nave cannot be substantiated.



10.2 The north nave is clearly the earliest standing part of the building. There is nothing in the appearance of the limestone fabric however to indicate that it was extended eastwards in the 13th century, as suggested by Radford who assumed a shorter nave and narrower chancel as this was the normal layout of churches in the region. The critical join (see Fig. 1) is now disguised externally by the organ chamber. However it should be stressed that Radford did not have access to it either and his views are no more than conjecture.

10.3 Blocked bays in the north wall indicate a short aisle (or conceivably a chapel) now gone. The arcade has been attributed to the 13th century, and is generally considered to have been cut through the existing wall. Though much of the wall face has been removed or obscured by the 19th-century additions, the views on this later insertion seem perfectly legitimate.

10.4 Radford also proposed a south aisle to match and balance the proposed north aisle. His argument was based on the interrupted plinth on the west wall of the south nave which, he assumed, indicated that the new south nave was butted up against a pre-existing structure, that is the old south aisle. As a result of the current recording programme it can be seen that the interruption of the plinth is due to late, possibly 19th-century, rebuilding of the west wall, and the concept of an earlier south aisle should be dropped.

10.5 The discovery of a blocked doorway built into the north wall and only revealed in 1938 when it was re-set as an entrance into the vestry, then being created from an older hearse house, adds to the complexity. Its discovery during work that had not been approved by faculty, and the subsequent censure of the then vicar, does little to clarify the situation. It is unclear whether this doorway was set within the blocking of the arcade, though this seems very likely, but whether it gave access to a medieval or later part of the church is unknown.

10.6 The south nave with its chancel were added in the earlier 16th century. Hubbard implied that the south nave was extended to create a new chancel as a result of Conway's will in 1540, but it is clear from the fabric analysis that the south nave is all of one build. It can thus be assumed that the south nave was erected in the earlier 16th century, and the central arcade, which would have been an integral feature and was dated by Radford to c.1520, suggests a date for the whole enlargement. There is no need to suggest as Radford did (and as is indicated in Fig. 1) that the arcade was rebuilt at this time.

10.7 The tower is of one build and variously claimed to be 15th century and mid 16th-century up to c.1552. However, the belfry windows appear to be 16th century and there is nothing at all to sustain an earlier date (*contra* the church plan based on Radford's unsubstantiated claims). The parapet stage could be either rebuilt or added, perhaps when turret built in c.1600.

10.8 The revised sequence is thus:

1. Initial building of limestone rubble. 12th century?
2. Construction, whether implemented or simply planned of a north chapel or aisle and the insertion of a 13th-century arcade. Possible blocking of a window high up in the north wall.
3. Blocking of the north arcade and insertion of a doorway.
4. Building of south nave and arcade in the earlier 16th century; demolition of the north chapel/aisle.
5. Building of tower in middle of 16th century
6. Porch added after 1540.
7. Addition of turret to tower after c.1600
8. Lychgate constructed in c.1677
9. Restoration in 1857 by H Kennedy.
10. Addition of organ chamber c.1875

11. Restoration of 1898
12. Conversion of hearse house to vestry, 1938

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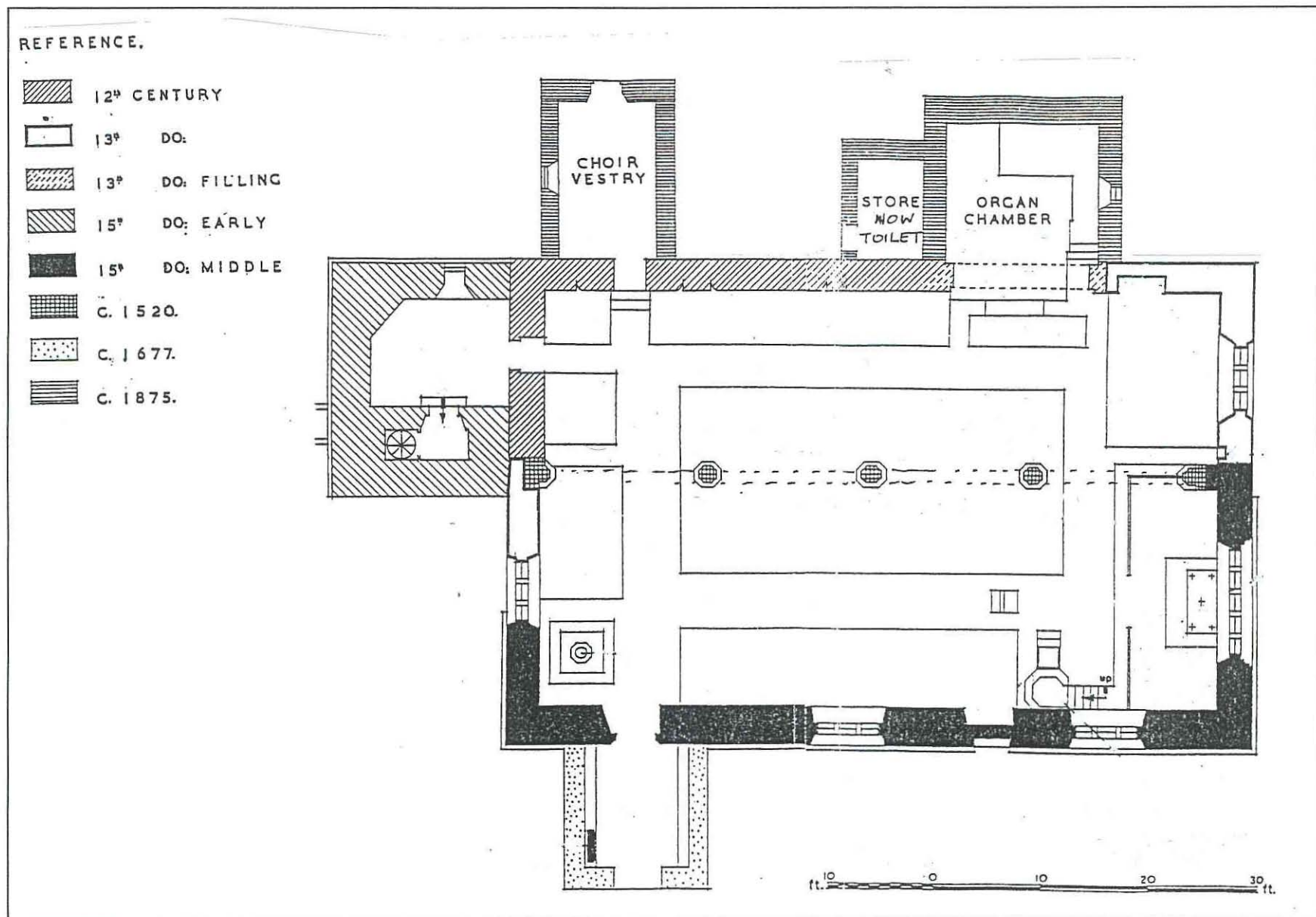
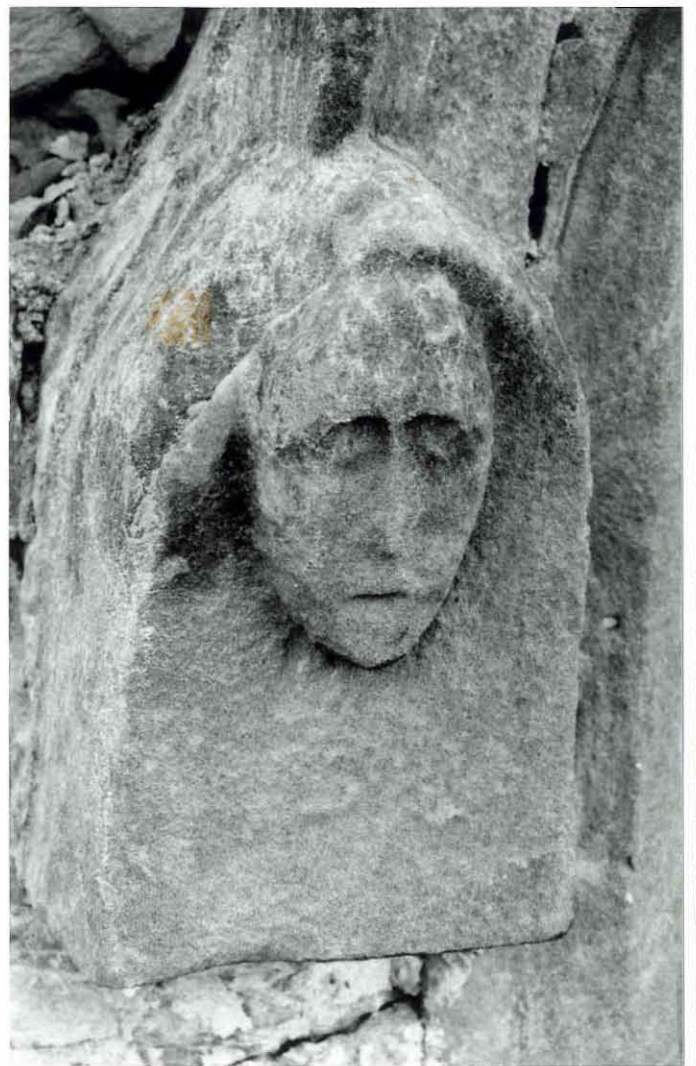


Fig 1: Llandrillo-yn-Rhos church: possible sequence of development based on Radford 1939 and taken from the church guide



Plate 1: butt joint between north and south  
naves in east wall

Plate 2: medieval head stop to east window  
of south nave





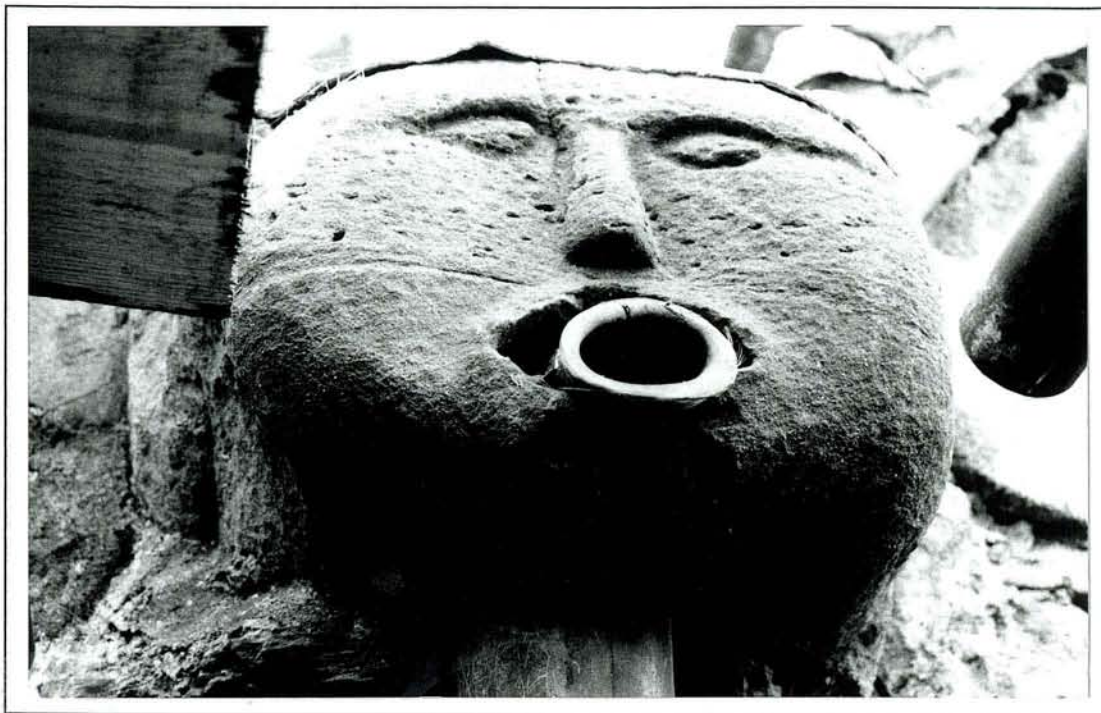


Plate 3: primitive head functioning as a water spout on east wall

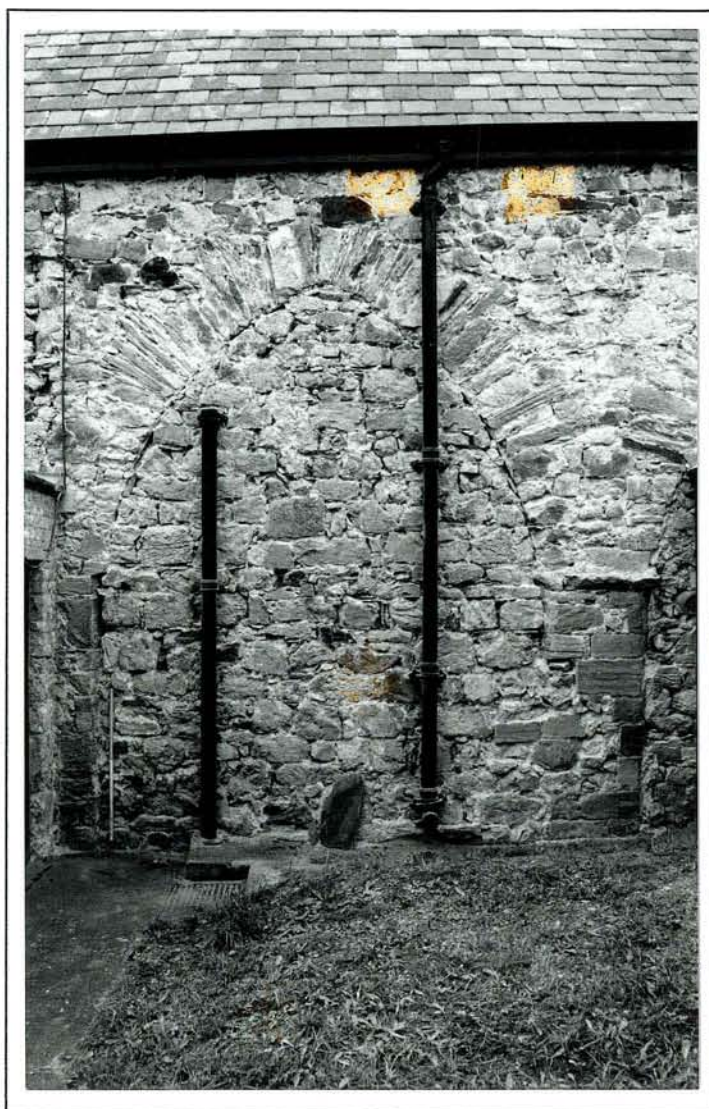


Plate 4: blocked arcade arch in north wall of north nave





Plate 5: blocked arcade arch in north wall  
- detail of surviving medieval plaster

Plate 6: blocked arcade in north wall - details of pier

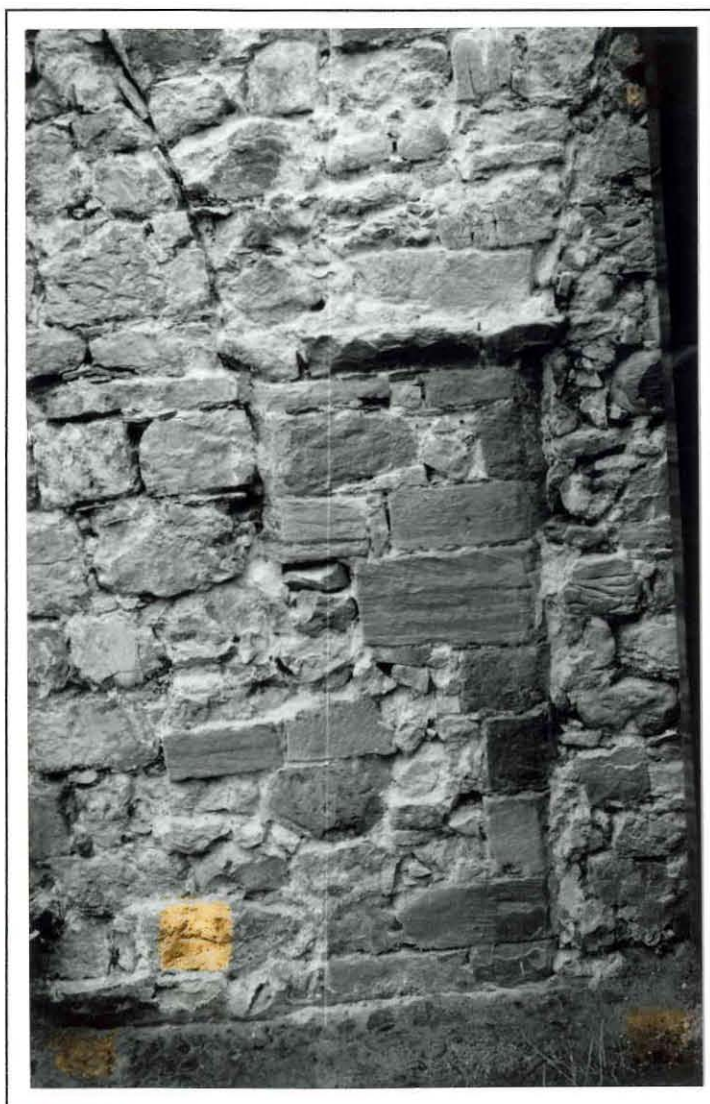






Plate 7: blocked window in north wall of north nave



Plate 8: masonry infill on top of west wall of south nave



Plate 9: putlog hole in west wall of south nave



Plate 10: east wall of porch after render removal





Plate 11: reused decorated stonework in south wall of church

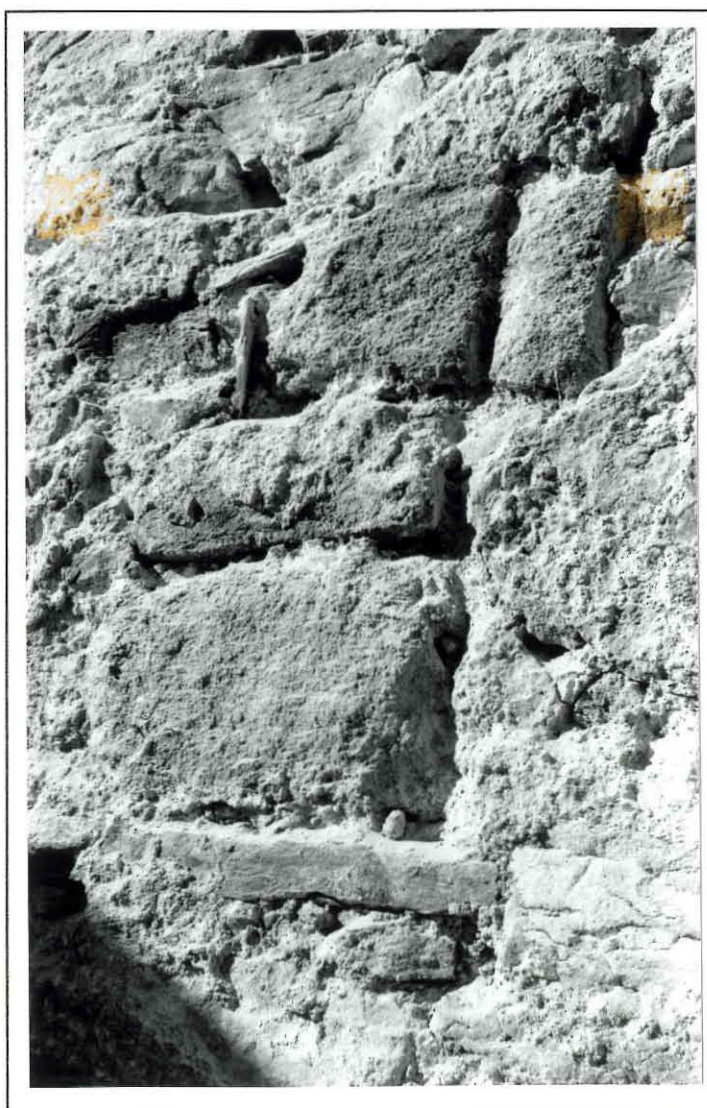


Plate 12: reused sandstone in south wall of church





Plate 13: west window in south wall with decorated fragments above and to one side

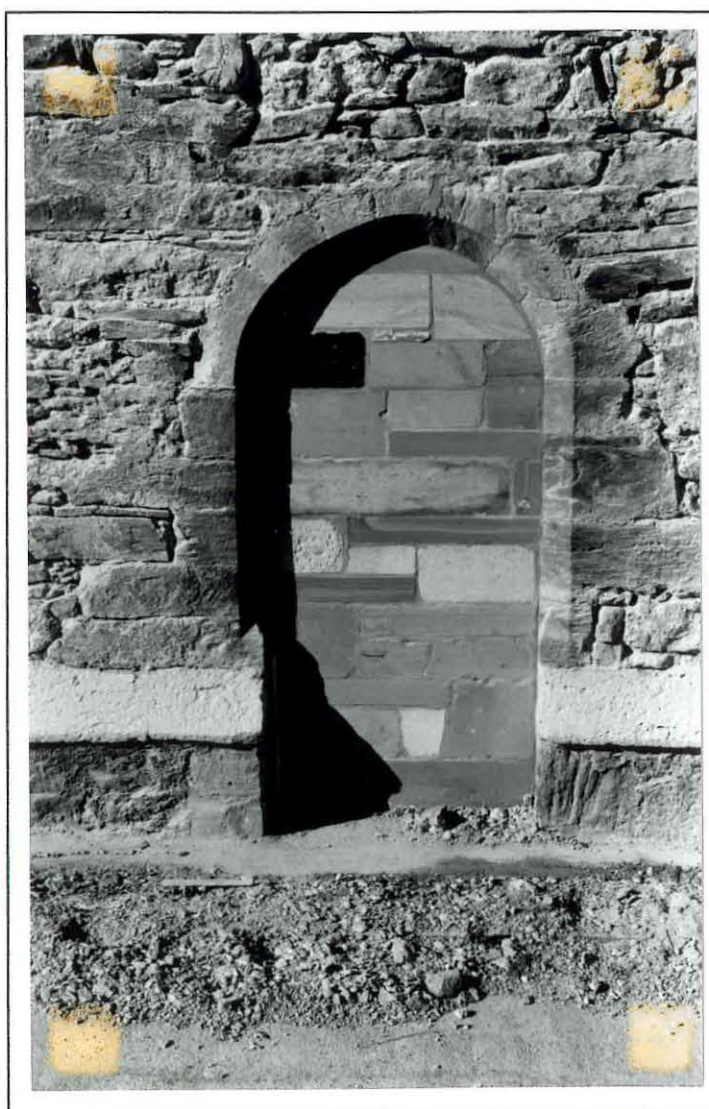


Plate 14: blocked priest's doorway in south wall